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current research

"NEW" SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF MIGRATION IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

Abstract: The lack of reliable direct measurements of migration in Germany before the late nineteenth century has led to unsupported generalizations about mobility trends before industrialization. We describe a virtually unused source of demographic records from the *Regierungsbezirk Düsseldorf* which aggregated yearly migrations at the community level between 1812 and 1865. The data and their collection are described, their accuracy is evaluated, and their known locations listed.

The study of internal migration in nineteenth-century Germany has been guided, or perhaps misguided, by several beliefs which have been incorporated into modernization theory. Most historical demographers assume that German society was generally immobile before the nineteenth century.⁽¹⁾ The development of industrial capitalism then caused mobility to reach unprecedented heights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mainly due to a permanent shift of population from rural, agrarian to urban, industrial areas. Migration from eastern Prussia to the Ruhr Valley after 1870 is usually taken as the paradigm for German mobility in the industrial era.⁽²⁾

These ideas have persisted despite the gradual accumulation of contrary evidence. A sizable body of local research demonstrates that pre-industrial Germans were surprisingly mobile, as was true in other European nations.⁽³⁾ The essential equilibrium of urban-rural exchange in the decades before World War I and the sharp decline in geographical mobility since then can clearly be seen in published migration registration data.⁽⁴⁾ Although no new theoretical formulations have yet emerged, it is clear that a fundamental reevaluation of the patterns and structure of German internal migration is needed.

The major reason for the longevity and the limitations of the conventional view is the lack of data that directly measure migration. Systematic and continuous national registration of internal migration began only after 1945. Thus, most studies of geographical mobility have depended on published census results. Questions about birthplace were regularly asked in German censuses after 1871, providing some indirect clues about migration.⁽⁵⁾ But such results only note the current residence of someone who had migrated at an unspecified earlier date. The migrations of those who had come and left, returned from a previous trip, or made several moves remain invisible. Measurement of migration from a census is analogous to measurement of fertility using only the numbers of children living and still resident, without even knowing their ages. The constant flux of nineteenth-century urban and rural populations is distorted by the static census snapshots. Migration is assumed not to have been significant in Germany before 1850, partly due to the absence of census data.⁽⁶⁾ Theoretical conjecture about the nature of migration before the *Gründerzeit* has virtually replaced empirical research.

An important but virtually unused source has begun to provide a more reliable statistical foundation for the study of migration before indus-

trialization: the annual reports of demographic changes collected by local administrators, both French and Prussian, in the lower Rhine between 1812 and 1865. These unpublished documents, usually titled *Übersicht der Veränderungen in der Bevölkerung der Bürgermeisterei XYZ während des Jahres 18XX*, list the aggregate births, deaths, in- and outmigrations in a particular community for a given year. For the purposes of migration analysis, these reports summarize millions of movements, categorized by individual characteristics, locality, and year. A few recent research projects have exploited this unusual source and, in the process, have begun to revise German demographic history.(7)

DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIAL DEMOGRAPHIC RECORDS

The *Übersicht der Veränderungen in der Bevölkerung* (hereafter termed *Veränderungen*) was instituted during French rule in the lower Rhine and were a direct product of an administrative need for accurate population statistics. As early as 1809, the Interior Ministry of the Grand Duchy of Berg instructed local officials to make house-to-house surveys and develop summary statistical tables listing the number and characteristics of buildings, households, servants, and cattle.(8) These data did not prove completely satisfactory, however, and the chief magistrate of the Department of the Rhine called for the implementation of a population register, beginning with an accurate survey of each resident.(9) In addition, each local official was reminded to submit quarterly reports of population change, including summaries of migration. These efforts were still judged as too imprecise, especially in cities.(10) The administration of the Grand Duchy required accurate population figures and a new census was ordered for 1812. But the effort was costly and a revised method to determine basic annual population characteristics was developed.(11)

Commencing with the last quarter of 1812, special forms, the *Veränderungen*, listed the total number of births, deaths, and migrations, tabulated by sex and marital status. Population growth for each religious group was also determined. Local officials were especially reminded that keeping an accurate count of migrations was crucial for calculating population statistics. Even in the turbulent years after Napoleon's catastrophic invasion of Russia and his defeat before Leipzig, these statistics were regularly compiled by the reorganized government of Berg. These data, however, are not especially useful; only a handful of communities show any migrants at all, and even fewer provide plausible figures.(12)

After Prussia assumed formal control of the lower Rhine in mid-1815, the French practice of collecting demographic statistics was continued in the *Regierungsbezirk (RB) Düsseldorf*, although the *Veränderungen* were still incomplete for several years. At first only the urbanized *Kreise* in the southeastern corner of the RB reported. Some communities reported no migrants; confusion about proper forms meant that others failed to divide migrants into marital status and sex categories.(13) By the end of 1816, data collection became more regular and formal. Printed sheets were used in various *Kreise*. Because of continued difficulties at the local level and the administrative reorganization of the entire lower Rhine, the first year for which complete migration data are available is 1821.(14) Thereafter the *Veränderungen* preserved in the *Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf* cover every *Bürgermeisterei* in the RB Düsseldorf through 1854, and many through 1866 (see Appendix).

The French statistical methods apparently were continued only in the RB Düsseldorf and the practice was not extended to the rest of Prussia.(15)

Communications from Berlin never mentioned the *Veränderungen*, although all other periodical statistical reports were discussed.(16) Published histories of the Prussian Statistical Office do not mention these data.(17) From a national point of view, the *Veränderungen* merely duplicated most of the data contained in other statistical summaries that were prepared each year and sent to Berlin from every Prussian district, notably the *Bevölkerungsliste*. Thus, the collection of migration data and the preparation of the *Veränderungen* appear to have been a purely local project, handled by the district bureaucracy in Düsseldorf.

The absence of procedures to record the ebb and flow of the Prussian population did not mean, however, that the national government was indifferent to the problem of keeping track of migrants. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Prussian government was especially interested in counting the millions of emigrants who left the country.(18) By contrast, internal mobility was seen as an aspect of public safety and tax collection rather than demographic change. Restrictions were imposed on the movements of allegedly suspicious groups, including foreigners, young workers, and servants. After 1832 attempts were made to keep track of temporary residents and renters as well.(19) Evidently official uncertainty about the legality of these regulations and inability to enforce compliance meant that most internal migration remained hidden from official view.(20)

It was only in 1857 that the Prussian residency registration procedures became comprehensive and accurate enough to become an alternative source of information on geographical mobility. In that year, the cluster of police regulations was revised and expanded.(21) The former rules about non-residents (1832) and residency change (1838) were adopted without major modification. In addition, all migrants who intended to set up residence were obliged to report to the police within fourteen days of their arrival and receive a special certificate. Personal data on new arrivals was entered in permanent registration ledger books. The class tax rolls were corrected accordingly.

Apparently these new procedures finally allowed reliable measurement of internal migration in many Prussian districts. The Prussian statistical yearbook for 1867 summarized a large number of recent Kreis reports, some of which included migration data for the years 1859 to 1865. For the RB Düsseldorf, the data from the *Veränderungen* were cited.(22) Some of the original compilations still exist in local archives; systematic collection and comparison would provide the earliest possibility for analysis of regional differences in German mobility.(23)

But this was the end, rather than the beginning, of the efforts to collect statewide Prussian migration data, perhaps due to the reorganization of the Prussian bureaucracy when the North German Confederation was created. The Düsseldorf *Veränderungen* were regularly kept through 1865; fewer are preserved for 1866, many on new forms from Berlin, mainly concerned with international migration. Almost none exist thereafter. There are no published indications that migration data were collected between 1865 and 1919, except for large cities.(24) The Düsseldorf sources therefore represent a unique compendium of migration statistics for the decades before industrialization transformed the German landscape.

SCOPE AND RELIABILITY OF THE DATA

The *Veränderungen* available for the lower Rhine were created to measure aggregate annual changes in population. Information on migration was com-

piled for each Bürgermeisterei and then aggregated at several higher levels. At the end of each year, the numbers of migrants were totalled and recorded on the Veränderungen, subdivided into four categories: single males (including children), married and widowed males, single females, and married and widowed females. As is true for the results of any process of aggregation, certain types of information are completely unrecoverable. The original individual level data are presumably all lost. The age of the migrant, exact date of migration, distance travelled, and whether the migrant moved with a family or alone were ignored in the surviving tabulations. The lists for each Bürgermeisterei were then sent to the Kreisstadt, where a new Veränderung was created, listing each community, as well as the Kreis totals. These lists are available, but incomplete, as indicated in the Appendix. Local archives can probably furnish much of the missing information. Then Kreis lists were forwarded to Düsseldorf, where a final Veränderung was produced, listing each Kreis and the totals for the RB.

Other tabulations were also made on a less regular and formal basis, and attached to the Veränderungen. The most common grouped migrants according to whether their origin or destination was in the same Kreis, elsewhere in the RB, in the rest of Prussia, or in another state. Unfortunately, these tables were rarely further subdivided into the four sex and marital status categories, so that the interaction between these variables is lost. Occasionally tables of religious affiliation were compiled.

Administrators in Düsseldorf were concerned that the Veränderungen be as accurate as possible, because these reports were the best means of ascertaining demographic change. Mixed in with the reports themselves are copies of correspondence evidencing this concern. For example, the 1839 Veränderung for the city of Krefeld contained two errors in addition, which were carried onto the report for the Kreis Krefeld and routinely sent to the Interior Department in Düsseldorf on 16 January 1840. Within a week, the Landrat in Krefeld received a letter from the central authorities demanding correction of these errors and warning that these "very important lists" must be better prepared.(25) Similar errors two years later prompted the Interior Minister to send a stinging letter to Krefeld:

The fact that proper exactitude on the part of the calculator would have avoided these errors provides us with clear proof ... the authentication of arithmetical accuracy is attached without sufficient checking. We must earnestly reproach such a superficial procedure of the calculator.(26)

The Landrat responded by complaining to the mayor of the town of Willich about carelessness. Eventually the offending errors were corrected.(27)

Local officials occasionally checked the Veränderungen against other data to locate possible errors. In the nine communities of the Kreis Rees, for example, total population figures based on these reports were compared with tax lists; the statistics for five villages agreed exactly, and the other four were less than 1 % off.(28)

Prussian censuses became increasingly reliable after 1843, when more accurate procedures were introduced. Checking the population totals derived from censuses with the Veränderungen revealed only small discrepancies. For the city of Düsseldorf in 1858 and 1864, the differences were less than 0.5 %. A more extensive comparison for the entire Kreis Düsseldorf showed discrepancies under 0.5 % for population totals by community, sex, and religion.(29) These checks indicate that the method of calculating total population used in the Veränderungen, adding natural increase to net migration,

produced virtually the same results as census counts. Whatever inaccuracies existed in the migration data, as in births and deaths, apparently were cancelled out in net calculations.(30)

The additional tables on origin and destination were not checked as thoroughly when prepared, and sometimes were not revised when errors in the Veränderungen were discovered. Thus there are occasional small disagreements in the total number of migrants listed. In general these data must be treated with caution, especially because of the ambiguous nature of the original evidence itself. It is not clear whether origin represented birth-place or last residence; declarations of destination indicated intentions which might have been altered en route.

As a result of the attention to internal consistency, the Veränderungen represent the most accurate available counts of annual residential change at the local level for this period. Based on this reputation, local and regional government officials and statistical writers of the time assumed that the Veränderungen were reliable population counts. Newspapers and standard statistical publications reported both local and district demographic data derived from these sources.(31)

The Veränderungen can serve as minimum estimates of mobility in communities of the RB Düsseldorf for the early nineteenth century. While all attempts to measure migration are fraught with difficulties, these reports are at least as accurate as any other official sources of demographic data, providing the best available insight into early nineteenth-century geographic mobility. Much more can and must be done in order to bring the actual dimensions of German internal migration into focus. By increasing awareness of this neglected data source, we hope that others can join in this effort.

APPENDIX: Locations of Veränderungen

Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf

Großherzogtum Berg 10206, v. I-IV (various communities 1812-1813)

General Gouvernement Berg 1285 (various communities 1813-1815)

Regierung Düsseldorf 413 (RB Düsseldorf by Gemeinde, 1816, incomplete)

414 (RB Düsseldorf by Gemeinde, 1821)

415 (Kreise Düsseldorf (1849), Elberfeld (1848-1854), Solingen (1848-1854), Duisburg (1848-1852), Rees (1848-1853), Neuss (1849-1853), Krefeld (1850-1854), Geldern with Moers (1849-1854), Kempen (1850-1854), Kleve (1852-1854) by Gemeinde)

416 (RB Düsseldorf by Kreis, 1824-1837)

417 (RB Düsseldorf by Kreis, 1838-1854; Kreis Neuss by Gemeinde, 1848)

418 (RB Düsseldorf by Gemeinde, 1818-1819, incomplete)

420 (Kreise Düsseldorf, Elberfeld, Solingen, Lennep, Essen, Grevenbroich, Neuss, Gladbach, Krefeld by Gemeinde, 1820).

Landratsamt (LA) Düsseldorf 116-119 (Kreis Düsseldorf by Gemeinde, 1841-1843, 1846-1849, 1853-1858, 1860, 1862-1865)

LA Lennep 229, 244-245 (Kreis Lennep by Gemeinde, 1835-1860, 1863)

LA Duisburg-Mülheim 308 (Kreis Duisburg including Essen by Gemeinde, 1853-1858; Kreis Duisburg by Gemeinde, 1859-1863)

LA Essen 59 (Kreis Essen by Gemeinde, 1864-1865)

LA Grevenbroich 132 (Kreis Grevenbroich by Gemeinde, 1830-1866)

LA Neuss 278-280 (Kreis Neuss by Gemeinde, 1854-1858, 1864-1866)

LA M.-Gladbach 6 (Kreis Gladbach by Gemeinde, 1821, 1834-1866)

LA Krefeld 11 (Kreis Krefeld by Gemeinde, 1828-1847)
 LA Moers 84 (Kreis Moers by Gemeinde, 1857-1866)
 LA Kleve 129 (Kreis Kleve by Gemeinde, 1838-1841, 1847-1851)

Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf
 II 1299 (City of Düsseldorf, 1816-1866)

Stadtarchiv Solingen
 A 7 24 v.1 (Solingen, 1821-1841; Dorf 1824-1841)
 Gemeindebezirk Ohligs I 4 8 v.1 (Merscheid, 1838, 1841-1842, 1848-1866;
 Wald, 1841-1842)
 Gemeindebezirk Dorf III 35 14 v.1 (Dorf, 1846, 1848-1866)
 Gemeindebezirk Grefrath I 18 2 v.3 (Grefrath, 1846-1848)

NOTES

- 1 For example, Hartmut Kaelble claims there is "wide unanimity" that "industrialization led to ... a definite break with the immobile preindustrial society": "Einführung und Auswertung", in Werner Conze and Ulrich Engelhardt, eds., *Arbeiter im Industrialisierungsprozess: Herkunft, Lage und Verhalten*, Stuttgart: 1979, p. 19-20.
- 2 See the influential essays of Wolfgang Köllmann, collected in *Bevölkerung in der Industriellen Revolution*, Göttingen: 1974.
- 3 An analysis of this evidence can be found in Steve Hochstadt, "Migration in Preindustrial Germany", forthcoming in *Central European History*.
- 4 Dieter Langewiesche used the summaries of urban migration published in the *Statistisches Jahrbuch deutscher Städte* in his "Wanderungsbewegungen in der Hochindustrialisierungsperiode. Regionale, interstädtische und innerstädtische Mobilität in Deutschland 1880-1914," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, v. 64 (1977), p. 1-40. Karl Schwarz complained that the official German migration data from the twentieth century showing the mobility decline were ignored in the literature: *Analyse der räumlichen Bevölkerungsbewegung*, Hannover 1969, p. 82.
- 5 For an analysis of the development and character of Prussian and Imperial census methods during the nineteenth century, see James H. Jackson, Jr., *Urbanization and Migration in the Ruhr Valley 1850-1900*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Minnesota, 1980, Appendix Two.
- 6 Köllmann, *Bevölkerung in der Industriellen Revolution*, p. 35-46, 125-139.
- 7 Horst Matzerath, "Industrialisierung, Mobilität und sozialer Wandel am Beispiel der Städte Rheydt und Rheindahlen", in Hartmut Kaelble et al., *Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland*, Opladen 1978, p. 13-79; Karl Obermann, "Die Arbeitermigrationen in Deutschland im Prozeß der Industrialisierung und der Entstehung der Arbeiterklasse in der Zeit von der Gründung bis zur Auflösung des Deutschen Bundes (1815 bis 1867)", *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, v. 13 (1972), p. 135-181; Friedrich Lenger, "Zu Ausmaß und Bedeutung der Wanderung im neunzehnten Jahrhundert. Anhand von Düsseldorfer Quellen", unpubl. manuscript, Universität Düsseldorf 1983; Jackson, *Urbanization and Migration in the Ruhr Valley*; Hochstadt, "Migration and Industrialization in Germany: 1815-1977", *Social Science History*, v. 5 (1981), p. 445-468.

- 8 Ministerium des Innern, "Instruktion an die Herren Maires, über die Anfertigung der statistischen Tabellen für das Jahr 1809", Sammlung von Urkunden, General-Verordnungen und Gesetzen des Großherzogthums Jülich, Cleve und Berg, Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (hereafter HStAD), Jülich-Berg Landesverwaltung, HS L II 7 XVI 46-47.
- 9 "Die Einführung der vollständigen Bevölkerungs-Register mittels namentlicher Aufzeichnung aller Individuen betreffend", Präfectur-Acten des Rhein-Departements (1810), p. 179-182.
- 10 Präfectur-Acten des Rhein-Departements (1810), p. 162; "Die Aufnahme der Bevölkerung betr.", Präfectur-Acten des Rhein-Departements (1812), p. 334-335.
- 11 "Die Veränderungen der Bevölkerung betr.", Präfectur-Acten des Rhein-Departements (1812), p. 434-435.
- 12 See the Appendix for a full listing of known locations of the Veränderungen.
- 13 The district government in Düsseldorf reminded local authorities of their obligation to report all demographic changes occurring in their jurisdictions: letter of 15 August 1816 from the Königliche Regierung, I. Abtheilung in Düsseldorf of the Kreis Kommissar in Opladen, HStAD, La Solingen 331, p. 3
- 14 Max Bär, Die Behördenverfassung der Rheinprovinz seit 1815, Bonn 1919, p. 240-255.
- 15 There is some evidence that data concerning internal migration were collected in the RB Köln in 1816. Although Veränderungen were not produced in Köln thereafter, local officials continued to be confused about the type of migration data desired by central authorities. In several later reports produced at the Gemeinde level, the yearly figures for migration indicated that both internal and international migrants were counted; in the Kreis reports, these local figures were crossed out and replaced with much smaller ones. HStAD, Regierung Düsseldorf 413; LA Rheinbach 18, v.1; and LA Siegkreis 437, 463, 556.
- 16 For example, a directive from Berlin on 10 July 1843 to Düsseldorf requested yearly needs of blank statistical forms for all tables now preserved in the archives except for the Veränderung: HStAD, LA Krefeld 11, v. 2, p. 510.
- 17 Richard Boeckh, Die geschichtliche Entwicklung der amtlichen Statistik des preussischen Staates, Berlin 1863.
- 18 For a discussion of emigration sources see Walter D. Kampfhofner, Westfalen in der Neuen Welt, Münster 1982, Anhang A.
- 19 Gesetz-Sammlung für die Königlichen Preussischen Staaten 1817, (Berlin: 1817), p. 152-160; Bureau der Königlichen Regierung, Amtsblatt der Regierung zu Düsseldorf (Düsseldorf: no. 103 (1835), p. 250-251; no. 35 (1835), p. 250-251; no. 9 (1838), p. 54.
- 20 Bureau der Königlichen Regierung, Amtsblatt der Regierung zu Düsseldorf, No. 10, Düsseldorf 1852, p. 77-80.

- 21 Bureau der Königlichen Regierung, Amtsblatt der Regierung zu Düsseldorf, No. 37, Düsseldorf 1857, p. 520-523.
- 22 Jahrbuch für die amtliche Statistik des preussischen Staates, v. 2, Berlin 1867, p. 288-343.
- 23 Known locations of demographic data, including migration statistics, are listed in James H. Jackson, Jr., "Population Registers in Nineteenth-Century Germany", chart 1, in Andrea Schiaffino and David Kertzer, eds., European Population Registers (forthcoming).
- 24 Prussian data of uncertain quality for 1919-1923 can be found in Statistisches Jahrbuch für den Freistaat Preussen, v. 19, Berlin 1923, p. 22-27, and v. 20, Berlin 1924, p. 10-12. In this case, too, local archives may contain some original compilations. For nineteenth-century data on large cities, see unpublished yearly municipal Verwaltungsberichte, local statistical yearbooks, and, for the years after 1881, the Statistisches Jahrbuch deutscher Städte.
- 25 HStAD, LA Krefeld 11, v. 2, p. 306-307, 329-330, 344; see also p. 273-275, 294.
- 26 HStAD, LA Krefeld 11, v. 2, p. 491.
- 27 HStAD, LA Krefeld 11, v. 2, p. 463-464, 492-493.
- 28 HStAD, Regierung Düsseldorf 415, p. 35; see p. 105, 160, and 281 for subsequent years.
- 29 HStAD, Regierung Düsseldorf 119, p. 98-107, 183-184.
- 30 An example of the lengths to which local officials would go to maintain the accuracy and completeness of their Veränderungen can be seen in the following zealous displays of fastidious demographic bookkeeping. In 1819, the village of Buchholz, with 218 residents, was absorbed into the Bürgermeisterei Wickrath; the Veränderungen for 1819 lists these 218 people as "immigrants" to Wickrath. Later in that year, several villages in the Bürgermeisterei Neersen were transferred into Kleinkempen. The Veränderungen show this administrative change as immigration into Kleinkempen and outmigration from Neersen. See HStAD, Regierung Düsseldorf 419, p. 36-37, 42, 50-51, 69-70. Even the movements of prisoners in the jail in Werden were shown as migrations: HStAD, LA Duisburg-Mülheim 308, v. 1, p. 48, 171. These "migrations" without movement can easily be separated from actual mobility data.
- 31 J.F. Wilhelmi, Panorama von Düsseldorf und seinen Umgebungen, Düsseldorf 1928, p. 70-71; Johann Georg von Viebahn, Statistik und Topographie des Regierungsbezirks Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf 1836, part 1, p. 124; Otto von Müllmann, Statistik des Regierungsbezirks Düsseldorf, v. 2, Iserlohn 1865, part 1, p. 183.

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